

# **New Portage Guide Development Summary**

## **Background**

The Portage Project began as a demonstration project funded by the U.S. Department of Education in 1969. The purpose of this project was to develop a model to support the development of young children with disabilities. Staff was not satisfied with existing assessment and curriculum for young children, so, they began developing their own. Project staff utilized existing research on child development and norm referenced standardized tools such as the Alpern Boll Developmental Profile, Bayley Scales of Infant Development, Vineland Social Maturity Scale, Preschool Attainment Record, Peabody Picture Vocabulary Test, and Denver Developmental Screening Test to develop a criterion referenced checklist of skills. Over the years of use, the project has revised the original materials and created companion material.

The Portage Project since 1972 has developed, published and distributed three developmental assessments: The Portage Guide to Early Education (PGEE), the Portage Classroom Curriculum (PCC), and Growing Birth to Three. The Portage Guide to Early Education was revised twice by the Portage Project and has been translated by universities and early childhood experts in over 30 countries. Several factors led to the complete revision of the Portage Guide to Early Education, published as the New Portage Guide in 2003. These factors included the following: new research on brain development and the relationship between social emotional development and early learning, new research on early literacy and pre-math, recognition of the importance of embedding intervention into daily routines, development of early learning standards, and the Head Start Outcome Framework

## **The Revision Process**

### **The Review**

The revision process included reviews by child development experts. Betty Black, PhD. Professor, Family Consumer Science Department, UW-Madison and Jill McDonald, Curriculum Specialist, UW- Milwaukee and a former Head Start teacher who had adapted the Portage Classroom Curriculum, Milwaukee reviewed and provided written comment on the Portage Classroom Curriculum. These reviews were important as we moved to create a revised package of materials that would serve programs working with both classrooms and home visitation models.

We also gathered information through telephone interviews. One set of questions was directed toward professionals in the developmental assessment and curriculum fields. The following professionals were interviewed: Mary McLean, PhD., Professor Exceptional Education, UW-Milwaukee, Linda Sespinoso, University of Missouri, Kathy Boisvert, Birth to Three Specialist, Karla Firkus, Education Manager, Head Start, Cindy Bewick, PhD, TriCounty Head Start, Education Manager and Adjunct Instructor for Michigan State University and Western Michigan University, Barbara Bernhart,

Education Manager, Urban Day Head Start, Ann Hains, PhD., Professor Exceptional Education, UW-Milwaukee, and Amy Staples, Professor, Exceptional Education, UW-Milwaukee.

The second set of telephone interviews was directed to current users of the Portage Guide to Early Education and the Portage Classroom Curriculum. We used Portage Product sales reports to select programs that were long time consumers. About 20 individuals across the country in a variety of programs were interviewed.

### **Curriculum and Assessment Review**

The following curriculum/assessment tools were reviewed for conceptual and format considerations: Growing Birth to Three, Creative Curriculum, Child Observation Record (COR) 2 ½ - 6, Child Observation Record (COR) Infant and Toddlers, Work Sampling.

Growing Birth to Three materials, published by the Portage Project in 1993, are used in Birth to Three programs in the US, Norway, Russia and Portugal. We pulled assessment items and activity ideas for the Infant/Toddler section of the New Portage Guide from the Growing Birth to Three. Karen Wollenberg and Elizabeth Olsen, authors of Growing, consulted with the Development Coordinator in shaping the vision of the tool and the process. The Portage Guide to Early Education was also used as a source of assessment items.

The following documents/tools were reviewed for content: The Head Start Child Outcomes Framework; National Council of Teachers Mathematics(NCTM) guidelines; National Science Education Standards; Wisconsin Model Early Learning Standards (draft); Much More Than the ABC's (NAEYC publication); Developmental Profile II; Bayley Scales of Infant Development; Rockford Infant Developmental Evaluation Scales (RIDES) Checklist; The Ounce; Evaluation and Programming System (AEPS) for Infants and Children; AEPS for Three to Six Year Olds; Hawaii Early Learning Profile (HELP); Growing Birth to Three; and the original Portage Guide to Early Education (PGEE).

From this review and ongoing discussions with the Portage Project Focus Group and our educational consultants we conceptualized the following guiding principles:

1. Design the tool to cover the ages Birth through 6 years old;
2. Make assessment items strength-based and functional;
3. Embed the assessment process in daily routine and activities (items are easily found in the daily life of the child);
4. Items can be assessed in a center-based program, home-based or family child care settings;
5. Involve the parent in the assessment process from the beginning; support the teacher/care giver by providing an understanding of development and how the child learns;
6. Support the provider/care giver by providing, tools to help them think ecologically, reflectively and in terms of their relationship with children,
7. Provide the user with a curriculum planning process and the tools to do that job from assessment to implementation and evaluation (the Weekly Planning Form, the Child

Planning and Family Partnership Document, Group Summary Form and NPG Wall Chart) and;  
8. Develop a computerized assessment tool.

### **The Focus Group**

In November 2001 a focus group was formed to explore the revision of the Portage materials. Members of this group included, Julia Herwig, Portage Project Director; Karen Wollenberg and Elizabeth Olsen, Birth to Three Specialists and developers of the Growing Birth to Three materials; Annette Copa, Mental Health Specialist, Ruth Chvojicek, former Head Start teacher and curriculum specialist, Wendy Bowe, former Head Start Director and child development specialist; Bill Welch, Head Start Disability Coordinator and Training and Technical Assistance provider; Sally Hruska, PhD. Birth to Three and Early Head Start Specialist; Cindy Bewick, PhD. Adjunct Instructor, Michigan State University, Nola Larson, Project Coordinator and Child Development Specialist.

### **Outside Consultant Experts**

Outside consultant experts continued to review the assessment tool, and developmental activities throughout the development process. These individuals included Cindy Bewick, Ph.D., TriCounty Head Start Education Services Manager, Paw Paw, MI, Adjunct University Instructor and member of the Technical Work Group (TWG) on Child Outcomes and Program Monitoring for the Head Start Bureau. Dr. Bewick provided ongoing assistance that ranged from suggestions for the facilitation of the focus group to review of the Portage Guide Revision Plan and the Early Draft of the materials. Specifically she reviewed the assessment tool and related activities for essential items; redundancy; inclusion of Head Start indicators; item sequence; gaps in the sequence; and accuracy of the “Things to Consider” section. She made a number of recommendations which we followed. Sally Hruska, Ph.D. Northern Michigan University Instructor and Birth to Three and Early Head Start Specialist, worked with the Development Coordinator in reviewing and writing activities for the Infant/Toddler section. Ann Mullis, Ph.D. Florida State University provided a critique of the Preschool activities in the final stages of development. Dr. Mullis reviewed the materials to determine if there were gaps across the age ranges in each of the five developmental areas; and to evaluate the activities to see if they support the assessment item. Dr. Mullis also critiqued the accuracy of the “Why Is This Important?” section. Deb Benish, Occupational Therapist for Wisconsin school districts, specializing in the field of Sensory Integration reviewed all of the Sensory Organization assessment items and the corresponding activities, checking them for age appropriateness.

## **The Field Test**

A field test of the New Portage Guide materials was conducted in two phases: September through December 2003 the *Tool for Observation and Planning* and the *Planning and Aggregation Form* (later names the *Group Summary Form*); from February to May, 2003 the activities were field tested in three locations.

- Umatilla-Morrow Head Start, Umatilla, OR provided twelve teachers and home-based providers in a variety of field-test settings. Settings included Early Head Start Full Day Full Year, Home Base, Center based classrooms, Early Head Start Toddler Classroom, Full Day Full Year Head Start and 4k-center Classroom. This Head Start program collaborates closely with the local school district. This Head Start program serves families of Migrant and Seasonal Farm Workers and families of the Confederated Tribes of the Umatilla Reservation. This program also had a long history of using the Portage Guide to Early Education (PGEE).
- Mid-East Ohio Vocational School Child Care Center, Zanesville, OH provided field test locations 2 infant-toddler classrooms.
- Portage Community Preschool Program, Portage, WI. The Portage materials were used in two four-year-old kindergarten classrooms.

Teacher demographics include ages ranging from 20 years to over 56; formal education ranged from high school graduate to bachelor's degree; years of teaching experience ranged from 4 years to over 20 years.

A PowerPoint orientation was developed and emailed to the supervisors in the Oregon and Ohio programs. The Development Coordinator oriented the supervisors over the phone. The supervisors oriented their staff with Portage materials in hand. The field test began in the fall of 2002 with teachers and home visitors doing the initial assessment of developmental abilities using the Preschool Tool for Observation and Planning (TOP) and the Infant & Toddler TOP. In January 2003 a Field Test Feedback form was emailed to participants. Phone interviews were conducted with six individuals. All participants returned the feedback form and responses were summarized and the information used to make improvements in the materials. In February, a PowerPoint Orientation was provided to field test sites on how to use the activity cards, the Group Summary Form and the Weekly Planning Form. Two classrooms received two sets of activity cards for this phase of the field test. A feedback form was filled out and returned in May, 2003.

The Development Coordinator personally provided orientation for the four teachers in the Portage Preschool (4K) classrooms. They assessed children in their classrooms using the Preschool TOP in the fall of 2002. The Development Coordinator conducted on-site observations and interviewed staff for feedback.

## **Summary**

The New Portage Guide aligns with the Head Start Outcome Framework. It is also aligned with the Early Childhood Outcomes as defined in the legislation supporting programs for young children with disabilities. The New Portage Guide is also aligned with the Wisconsin Model Early Learning Standards and can be aligned with other state early learning standards as requested.

In summary, the New Portage Guide reflects input from numerous early childhood experts and builds upon current research in the field. It is an assessment and curriculum planning tool to support individuals working in various settings that offer programming to young children and their families. Most importantly, this tool is designed to support relationship based intervention which is family centered, ecological, and strength based...the core values of the Portage Project.